



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
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When Is Enough, Enough?

A sermon preached by the Rev. Wilma Jakobsen
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When I was back at home in South Africa in June, I had an unexpected opportunity to hear a remarkable address at a theological conference where I was visiting some friends for the day. Denise Ackermann, known to many as the mother of feminist theology in South Africa and who preached the sermon at my ordination as a priest, delivered a paper on 'Faith and Markets: Contemplating a Theology of Enough.' Her words spoke with a cutting edge into the context of current South Africa, struggling monumentally as it is with the enormous gap between rich and poor, experiencing violent protests by those who have grown tired of promises of housing and basic services that have not materialized. She spoke deeply into my own life and I have found myself continuing to reflect on their impact in the weeks since then. As I read the lessons for today from Exodus and the gospel of John, I found myself responding to some of the key themes we find there, and that they connect with the concept of contentment and how much is enough?

Let's take a look. The Israelites had been camping at a wonderful oasis and were now in the wilderness. They were grumbling and complaining with much resentment. They did this a lot, as they were experiencing the hardship that came with liberation. Their current pain had erased their memories of suffering and oppression as slaves in Egypt and they seemed to have forgotten their hardship as slaves in the light of the hardship of the wilderness. Instead of being told to stop their complaining, their leaders who communicated their complaints to God were met with God's compassion and provision and grace. In the story, God gave them meat and bread, or quails and manna, as the coriander seed-like bread was called. The gift came with the instructions to go out each day and gather enough for that day. That started me thinking, just how much is enough for the day? If I had been there, how much might I have collected until I felt I had enough for the day? Would I have stockpiled? I'm quite sure I would have – I'm not always that good at following instructions and I would probably have thought if I could collect more than enough for one day, I could skip the work of collecting the next day. Further on in chapter 16 we are told that whether people collected too much or too little it ended up being the same amount. Those who kept leftovers to eat the next day, found the next day that it went bad. On the day before the Sabbath they collected enough for two days and those who went out to collect on the Sabbath found no manna. There was enough, just as God had said there would be. In fact it seemed like there was plenty for everyone's need.

And in the midst of the manna and the quails, the evidence of God's gift and provision, giving the Israelites their first post-slavery experience of work to collect and prepare the available meat and the bread, there was also the mystery of God's presence, appearing in the cloud that symbolized to them the presence of the divine within their midst. In the end, God's provision far exceeded their expectation. They were looking backwards to the former things, expecting death, hoping only for a safe return to the land of their slavery. But God moved them

forwards, and bountifully gave them daily provision of their needs. With this God as theirs, there would be no need for stockpiling because with God, divine blessing would be regular. This was a lesson in trust, that the people of God could dream and hope for great things from a God who loves and cares for them.

It's a lesson in trust that we repeat every time we say the line in the Lord's prayer, Give us this day our daily bread. We pray for only what we need today because that is all we need. Tomorrow we can pray for what we need tomorrow. Scripture tells us that God provides for us each day what we need for today.

We see the link to the reading from John's gospel in the words about manna and bread. The people have been following Jesus because of the miraculous signs he performed and because he fed them when they were hungry, the last being the feeding of the five thousand, and they were looking for more bread. Jesus calls them on their motives and tells them not to work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life. Jesus tells them not to look back at the past, to the manna that was given, but to look to the present, to the one whom God is giving them now in the person he is. Jesus speaks about God giving them true bread from heaven, himself, but they don't get it. This leads up to one of the seven 'I AM' statements that Jesus makes about himself in the gospel of John, which would have been seen by some as blasphemous. Jesus tells them 'I am the bread of life.' The people want bread that will satisfy their physical hunger but Jesus is talking on a deeper level. As God provided manna in the wilderness for the Israelites, so the ultimate provision of God for humanity is Jesus Christ, so that humanity can experience the fullness of love, the fullness of God in Jesus Christ, who is the true manna, the bread of life.

So as we look at our own lives in the light of these Scriptures, when is enough, enough? It's all about trusting in God's abundant provision, enough for the day. That's much easier said than done, especially for those who are experiencing the harsh realities of the current economic climate. I acknowledge that this sermon is aimed at those of us with the luxury of a regular income and stable housing. Yet trusting there will be enough is not at all easy for any of us, whether we have a lot or whether we are struggling. We are born into a consumerist society and a globalized, capitalist economy that bombards us day in and day out with the unending message, it is never enough, there is never enough. Our desires are manipulated and controlled by market forces. If I don't buy this... or get this... I will not have enough, I will not be enough. If I don't stock up I might run out or I might not have enough when the time comes. We live in fear of scarcity, of not being or having enough, rather than abundance, but even in abundance there can be great fear. Wayne Muller, author of the book Sabbath, tells the story of a woman who separated from and divorced her husband of ten years, Along with her two small children, she moved into a tiny home and began to worry about the future, how she would provide for her family. "I was so scared", she said, "I went out and with some of my savings, bought a half a cow, had it butchered and froze it in a freezer in our garage. I had never been on my own and was terrified we would not have enough to eat. I thought having an abundance of food would make me feel safe. But it wasn't really abundance; all that food reminded me how scared I was." We are called to live not in fear but in trust, trusting that God's love will surround us no matter how bad things get.

So how much is enough for the day? When is enough, enough? What is the definition of enough in North America and Europe compared with the definition of enough in the poorest

countries of the world? How much do we consider that our definition of enough is overabundance and much more than plenty for others? When is enough, enough?

We can ask ourselves that question in so many ways - about things and stuff, about the way we work, about spirituality, about injustice in the world. The applications are endless. Let's take a brief look at these. How much stuff do we need and how much do we have and how much time and energy does it take us to care for and manage what we have? The more we have, the more it takes. When one doesn't have very much, one discovers how little one really needs to be able to live. I remember as a first year teacher when I lived in a tiny attic room with enough space for a bed, a desk and a cupboard. It took no time at all to clean and organize. I remember when as a Fuller Seminary student I could move all my possessions in a station wagon. Those days are gone and I am currently horrified at how easily I have accumulated things and papers in the years I have lived in the US. I am pondering what it would mean in a practical way, to live in simplicity. I am starting to take some steps about it this summer. I believe that the more we have, the more it takes of our time and energy, and the less time and energy we have to care for others and the world. If you want to see a wonderful documentary about this, come next week Sunday August 9th at 10.15am to see 'The Story of Stuff' and discuss it with others.

What about work? How much is enough? Those of us who are workaholic find it hard to close down the computer and say I've done enough for the day, for the week. That's why Sabbath rest is so important for us, whether it be a whole day or a morning or afternoon or a regular couple of hours, to stop and simply say, What's done is done, what's not done is not done, thanks be to God, now is the time to stop, to pause, to take a rest and be grateful.

What about consumer spirituality? We can spend our lives buying just one more book, attending one more workshop, one more conference, seeking the key that will transform our lives and make a difference. We can fall into the trap of never having enough, always needing more. Not to mention the sale of countless religious items, of which of course many are useful, some are necessary, but again, when is enough, enough? Spirituality is liable to the same "marketization," as stuff, said Denise Ackermann. In fact, consumer spirituality is "self-centered, immature... a form of religious tourism. It can never be satisfied because it doesn't seek a true other outside the self. Consumer spirituality (what Reg Bibby calls "*religion a-la-carte*") is not the same as the quest for God classical theologians have described, a quest that requires discipline of the self and the shaping of desire God-ward. The highest human desire is the desire for God. But this desire for God cannot be separated from the desire for the Reign of God. In other words, authentic spirituality thirsts for the justice that characterizes God's presence."

And in a different way as we apply the question to matters of injustice, when is enough, enough? It's why we ask you later today to sign letters to our senators about the healthcare reform currently under debate and to act on so many of the justice issues we care about so deeply here at All Saints. We need more than ever about so many issues local and global, to say Enough is Enough, it's time to act.

What does this mean for us in practical ways? What are we to do? Denise Ackermann suggests that we need as individuals and as faith communities to develop a spirituality of discernment and resistance. Nothing is simple and the nuances are important. Denise Ackermann says that "We have to move beyond simplistic rhetoric in order to understand what

"enough" means. But even more: we have to learn from those who don't have enough how to live in reliance on God, all the while without romanticizing poverty. A tall order indeed."

We start with ourselves - being attentive and discerning the inner promptings of the Spirit that move us towards God and God's reign, that will help us see that the manipulation by the market of our desires leads to false desires and false understanding of our needs. Then we move to resisting false desires and resisting consumerist choices, making instead the kind of choices that lead towards justice and the reign of God. We can examine our own habits of consuming and look to making different kinds of choices, like those who decide that every time they buy something, let's say a book, they will give away an equivalent, in this case a book; or choosing to support fair trade; or choosing always to share generously with those who are needy, even when we are not sure there will be enough for ourselves.

This kind of spirituality means nothing other than continual conversion, continually refusing the choices of false desires, continually choosing to ask each time one purchases a product, do I have enough without this? Do I really need this? What difference will it make to me or for whomever I am buying it? This kind of spirituality will change our lives and make a difference in the world. And quoting the Dalai Lama, "if you think you're too small to make a difference, you've never been in bed with a mosquito."

If this sounds difficult, it is! Living in trust IS difficult. It is only by grace that we can continually choosing to be content with what we have, what we've been given, knowing when we have enough. And so grace is perhaps the one thing we can never have enough of! To retell a story about grace that is worth retelling, that's not about grits but about pasta: God is like an Italian mama dishing out enormous plates of pasta, which is grace. Our only response should be to hold out our plates and say, More, Mama, More please! God is the giver of grace and we just have to ask. And where do we find that grace? Always in the Eucharist, in Jesus who is the bread of life, who is enough for us, for the world. As we feed on Jesus in the mystery of the Eucharist, so we are strengthened in order to go out and change the world, and we too are changed. Denise Ackermann said, On the other side of the Eucharist we SEE in a radically different way. She ended her paper with the image of a poor man on a borrowed donkey as counter to global capitalism. That's where the reign of God begins. That's the example we are called to follow. As we participate later in the Eucharist, may we have strength for the journey.

Amen.